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ABSTRACT

The Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal (CoPER) was formed in 1986 to cultivate the development of partner schools in the simultaneous renewal of schooling and the education of educators. The CoPER now includes 13 school districts and 6 institutions of higher education collectively engaged in work in more than 50 partner schools and other initiatives. Several perspectives were considered in order to evaluate CoPER operations and initiatives. The purpose and structure of the partnership created a significant challenge regarding an appropriate theoretical grounding to drive the research methodology. Eventually, an interactive and responsive evaluation approach was developed. Each school kept an activity log, and each site arranged for focus groups of its key stakeholders. Surveys were designed for faculty and students, and some classroom observations were carried out. The evaluation of CoPER, a state level umbrella organization, collected data germane to specific partner sites. The evaluation results were portraits of specific sites, but many common experiences or data trends could be extrapolated across sites and institutions. Much of the information discovered reflected the importance of relationships and the role of personalities. Results emphasize the individual differences and similarities of partnership members. (Contains 8 references.) (SLD)

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University/School District Partnerships from Multiple Perspectives: A Statewide View

FORM AND FUNCTION: USING MIXED METHODS TO STUDY WORKS IN PROGRESS

History

Colorado's foundation for the school-university partnership concept began to develop in 1983 when Cal Frazier invited John Goodlad to the state. The goal was to create school-university clusters to address particular themes/issues, similar to John Goodlad's League of Cooperating Schools. As with all of Dr. Goodlad's work, the point was to have inquiring educators creating renewing schools that provide excellent education for all students.

In 1985, Dr. Goodlad formed the Center for Educational Renewal (CER) at the University of Washington. Through the CER, he launched a comprehensive school-university partnership initiative focused on renewing schooling and the education of educators, which led to the creation of the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER). Because of Dr. Goodlad's prior association with Colorado, he invited interested superintendents and deans to form a formal school-university partnership and apply for membership in the NNER.

After numerous meetings and much discussion, leaders of seven school districts and two institutions of higher education formed the Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal (CoPER) in 1986. The Partnership became an initial member of the NNER, which now includes 16 settings in 12 states. Its mission was, and remains, the simultaneous renewal of schooling and the education of educators. This mission is grounded in an understanding of the responsibilities inherent in schooling in and for a democracy. The Partnership's work, along with that of other settings in the NNER, promotes the renewal of schools and teacher education programs so they support educators in

- becoming skilled in and using teaching practices that help all students learn (nurturing pedagogy);
- providing real access to knowledge for all students;
- becoming stewards of our schools; and
- enculturating the young into our social and political democracy.

From its inception, the Colorado Partnership has cultivated the development of partner schools as a significant avenue towards simultaneous renewal. Although this goal was elusive in the beginning, the strategy of taking smaller steps, accomplishing tasks together, cultivating relationships, and working for the good of the whole is showing results. The Colorado Partnership now includes 13 school districts and six higher education institutions collectively engaged in more than 50 partner schools and other initiatives, all of which point toward progress in simultaneous renewal (Wilson, 1998).

The Evaluation Process

As a complex consortium of higher education institutions and school districts, CoPER is joined by an explicit philosophical foundation that accommodates the distinct structures and policies of each partner institution. Because the NNER agenda is forwarded largely through partner schools that simultaneously renew public school and university faculties, the initial evaluation efforts of CoPER began at partner school sites.

The evaluation team focused on the following three purposes:

1. to understand ways in which partner school relationships, in general, and the CoPER, specifically, affect the work of its participants in teacher preparation programs and in the partner schools;
2. to facilitate partner school participants' reflection on the progress they are making toward the NNER's four functions of partner school work; and
3. to assist the CoPER in improving its support of members' educational renewal efforts.

In the process of developing a comprehensive study, several perspectives on evaluation were examined. The evaluation team discussions centered on the evaluation purposes, audiences, involvement of stakeholders, and uses of the data. The partnership is, by definition, democratic and promotes the professional growth of the entire learning community. The team agreed that a strong theoretical grounding was needed to address meaningful stakeholder involvement, multiple viewpoints, and variations in institutional structures while focusing the study on the common NNER goals of partner schools. While the study involved partner school settings that encompassed five different higher education institutions and several school districts, there was the overriding goal of producing information useful to CoPER as the umbrella organization.

Determining how to evaluate the statewide consortium resulted in many lively discussions, methodology maps, and debates on theory among the evaluation team members. The purpose and structure of the Partnership created a significant challenge regarding an appropriate theoretical grounding to drive the research methodology.

The complexity of the Partnership became more apparent as the evaluation team continued to formulate possible designs. Michael Fullan captured the enormity of the structure in the following observation, "There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that educational change is inherently, endemically, and ineluctably nonlinear." (Fullan, 1996, p.421) Fullan further noted that systemic reform evaluation efforts are appropriately messy, requiring data gathered on a number of proxy measures of systemic reform, as indicated by the state of the networking activities associated with particular initiatives (1996). These include "How much ongoing staff development is there within the network, and of what quality? How active and effective are the multilevel relationships with, for example, external facilitators? What links between school and community develop? What is the quality of product and problem sharing? How much built-in monitoring is there?" (p. 423).

Additionally, Goodlad noted "that institutions do not stand still for long; they renew or decline, Individuals collectively sustain the renewing process or are carried along by the decline." (Goodlad, 1988, p. 10). Organizations must be infused with relevant knowledge and alternative ideas to renew. Inquiry into the enterprise was identified as key to the renewal process (1988).

The evaluation team considered the many faces and voices of institutional change and renewal to develop a robust process. Furthermore, the study was to occur in the context of real working conditions and the notion of evaluation as the process of generating knowledge, by and for people who use it, suited the dynamic evolving partner site activities (Sirotnik, 1988, p. 175).

Discussion on Theory

For the evaluation, the following frameworks were considered:

1. *Empowerment Evaluation Model* where the evaluators are the stakeholders; evaluation is done by and for the stakeholders. In this model, it is critical that each stakeholder group has significant voice in the process, and that the evaluation results lead to successful achievement of program goals (Greene, 1994).
2. *Pragmatism* is characterized by its orientation to information that leads to decision making. The major emphasis is on producing practical and pragmatic information. The key audiences are the decisions makers. It addresses questions of program effectiveness as measured against the program goals and benefits (1994).
3. *Interpretivison* seeks to enhance contextualized program understanding for the stakeholders closest to the program. It addresses the question: How do various stakeholders experience the program? (1994).

An additional emerging research paradigm that influenced the design was "interactive" or "collaborative research" as summarized by Chien, Cook, and Harding where researchers and practitioners work together at all phases of the inquiry process. Mutual growth and respect occur among all participants while attention is given to both research and implementation issues (Sirotnik, 1988).

The purposes of the study served as the foundation for the evaluation team's decision to use a combination of Pragmatism and Interpretivison in the data collection and analysis. The Empowerment Model, while not used by the team, influenced the decision to examine the interactive paradigm and include stakeholders in the instrument design data collection process.

Partner schools served as the primary data collection sites. As the hub of Partnership activity, public school students, their parents, teachers, teacher candidates, and university faculty work together to forward the NNER agenda through the partner school functions.

Initiating the Evaluation

Stakeholder participation supported the CoPER's democratic operating principles and need for indepth information on partner sites. Appropriate involvement of partner site personnel was critical. Drawing from Anderson's work on participatory reform in education, the notion of authentic participation was explored with the following questions: "Who participates, in what areas, under what conditions and toward what end?" (Anderson, 1998, p. 575). Relevant stakeholders involved in safe structured ways allowed multiple voices to be heard. Using these conditions, the initial evaluation design emerged.

The evaluation team developed a preliminary process including a clear statement of purpose and research questions. General data collection options and suggestions working collaboratively with partner school personnel were developed. The team then conducted a session at the CoPER

Summer Institute in 1996 for prospective evaluation participants. At the session the team outlined:

- the evaluation process,
- data collection instruments,
- data analysis procedures,
- role of the site liaison, and
- future training sessions for participating sites.

Additionally, time was provided for dialog with partner school representatives (IHE and P-12). The session had three important outcomes, (1) informing partner sites about the evaluation plan, (2) soliciting volunteers to participate, and (3) getting feedback at the preliminary stages of the design process. From the session, four partner schools volunteered to participate in the first-year evaluation: two middle schools and two elementary schools. Additionally, one comprehensive high school that had previously begun an evaluation process was included. The two middle schools were paired with one another to conduct focus group interviews, as were the two elementary schools. Four schools districts and five IHEs were included in the first partner school studies.

To further understanding of the evaluation process, the team held training sessions with participating site personnel prior to the actual data collection processes. Instruments were previewed and refined based on participants' feedback. Additionally, the partner site volunteers were taught how to conduct focus group interviews so that they could assist in data collection at each other's schools.

The design included data collection processes to examine the evidence of the four partner school functions in day-to-day school practice. The partner school functions impact students, teachers, administrators, IHE faculty, teacher candidates, and parents. Therefore, instruments appropriate for various participants were needed. The evaluation also had to gauge the depth and breadth of the partner school activities over time. Following is a list of the data collection instruments used to address these needs:

1. *Activity logs* — Each school kept a one-year log of all activities associated with the partner school. Information included the type of activity, number and roles of participants, and outcomes.
2. *Focus group interviews* — Each site arranged for in-depth focus group interviews of its key stakeholder groups: P-12 students, teachers, administrators, and parents; IHE faculty and students. To include stakeholders in the process and increase their understanding of data collection techniques, participants from the studied sites were trained to lead focus group interviews at another site.
3. *Surveys* — Surveys were designed for the following stakeholder groups: P-12 faculty and students and IHE faculty and students.
4. *Classroom Observations* — Two Stallings observation system instruments were used to study the impact of school/IHE partner school involvement on P-12 students.

Multi site Issues

Each site had its own challenges. The four sites studied during the first year ranged in size from a high school with 1200 students to an elementary school of 600 which meant different logistical arrangements for focus group interviews, survey distribution, and meetings with staff. Each school had a different IHE partner, a unique schedule, and different rotation of teacher candidates and interns. There were differences in university presence on site, including number and types of courses taught on site, number of faculty assigned to the school, and range of responsibilities. Each site had a unique site liaison role varying in time and responsibility from full time to no release time. The universities had different teacher preparation programs, some with extensive time for a cohort group in one school and some with rotating school experiences. These variations made it critical that the evaluation probe how deeply they're understood and the value they add to the school.

Reporting Issues

The evaluation was conducted for CoPER, the state level umbrella organization, to gauge overall impact of the partnerships activities; yet, most of the detailed data collected were germane to specific partner sites. Meetings were held at each site to review the findings, cross-reference data and insure that communication channels were open and clear. Higher education participants were included in the site-level discussions. General findings were presented to the Partnership's Governing Board comprised of the deans and superintendents from the participating institutions and Coordinating Council of university and school district representatives responsible for communication. Each group was interested in different levels of analysis and wanted different questions answered. Some issues were program specific and could not be addressed through a cross-site, cross-institution evaluation. Additionally, higher education institutions and public school officials had different research needs. Higher education leaders were interested in learning more about the impact of the partner program on its students. Specifically, deans asked questions about the value added for their teacher candidates. They were interested in the preparation program as it compared to more traditional programs. As an example, Were the teacher candidates prepared through a partner school experience better first-year teachers? Superintendents, on the other hand, were deeply interested in improved student performance. They wanted to know if involvement in partner school activities had an impact on student standardized test scores. Principals and teachers were concerned about very specific local issues such as parent support, staff professional development, and quality of teaching.

What We Learned About the Process

Complexity

The process was interactive and responsive, seeking evidence of the abstract precepts that define CoPER within the day-to-day activities of designated sites. CoPER is a large and complex organization that promotes institutional collaboration through agreed upon principles of renewal aimed at improving universities and schools. Therefore, finding the right entry point for the evaluation was in and of itself a learning experience. The team focused data collection at the school level where the NNER functions of partner schools could be investigated as they related to real-life, school-based practices. As a result, the team learned a great deal about how schools and universities work together at a specific location. The results were portraits of specific sites;

yet, the team found common experiences or data trends that could be extrapolated across sites and institutions. However, those findings were useful primarily at the partner school level. Rich in school-based experiences, the data lacked information on overall CoPER and institutional experiences. While many of the findings could inform practice at the school level across the Partnership, the team found that the process did not result in institutional level themes. Additionally, each higher educational institution in the Partnership has its own teacher preparation program with different amount of time scheduled into schools, variations of faculty support at the site, and differences in degreed programs, i.e., some have only post baccalaureate programs while others offer bachelor degree programs.

Interactive Approach

An important characteristic of the evaluation was working collaboratively with the sites rather than functioning as external evaluators imposing additional work on the schools. This consideration was key to working in conjunction with the NNER partner school function of critical social inquiry where all members of the partner school community should engage in inquiry concerning school practices. (Clark, 1994.) The training sessions resulted in conversations that deepened participants' understanding of the partner school functions and research and evaluation purposes and methods. Pairing schools for focus group interviews provided the team with rich data while creating collegial relationships for the partner site participants.

Logistical Issues

The multifaceted process was important for thorough data collection and analysis but caused logistical problems. Scheduling times that personnel from the paired schools could visit each other's sites was difficult. Interviews and survey completion times had to account for the teacher candidates' schedules as well. Finding locations within schools where focus group interviews could be held and recorded with adequate space and quiet was difficult. As an example, one school scheduled a focus group interview for students with limited English who were accompanied by student interpreters in the cafeteria due to space constraints. While it was scheduled before lunch periods, the tentative responses and the preparation noise from the kitchen made transcription difficult.

Clear communication was important for consistent application of data collection instruments across sites. Many meetings were held to ensure that schedules were in order, surveys on hand, instructions clear, and questions answered as needed. The evaluation team concluded that the time spent in these activities was worthwhile for the data collection process itself but also resulted in better support from the sites and developed collegial relationships with site personnel. When data were being analyzed, there was a contact at each site that could be called upon to answer questions if needed. For example, one focus group interview, when transcribed, appeared unusual for the age group. A call to the site liaison clarified the concern. The school had inadvertently included a group of first graders in an interview process designed for students from fourth grade and older.

Parent permission was needed to interview students, district permission was needed for conducting research on site, and the faculties had to be informed of the process prior to initial data collection efforts.

What We Learned About Using the Findings

Much information was discovered regarding the importance of relationships. Institutional collaboration efforts were promoted or deterred by personalities. Policy, when put into practice, was as fragile or resilient as the relationship among parties on site who influenced the partner activities. In one example, school university communication was inconsistent and school personnel felt that the university did not operate in a collaborative manner. However, the university faculty assigned to the building were respected and trusted by the school faculty. The good relationships at the site overrode institutional differences. However, for long-term site relationships to thrive, the institutions needed to have mutual respect and shared understanding of the simultaneous renewal agenda. Unilateral decisions at an institutional level eventually undermined strong site collaboration. Conversely, where strong inter-institutional support existed, short-range problems at individual sites could be addressed.

In addition, schools and universities are markedly different cultural entities. Hence, each school and IHE involved in the study had different expectations and needs from the study. The evaluation team kept the findings and resultant discussions grounded in the collaborative purpose of the CoPER. Therefore, some questions specific to a program or district could not be addressed. Rather, the evaluation team provided general themes and trends that cut across sites and institutions with the expectation that individual organizations within the Partnership would use the findings as they related to their own settings.

The Partnership structure added its own interesting dimension. The organization is interdependent, requiring the collective support and unified direction of the many participating individual institutions. Partner institution leaders' commitment to collaboratively forwarding the NNER agenda is essential to the health of the organization. The combined efforts of influential leaders from throughout the state create synergism and strength. However, while the leaders comprising the CoPER Governing Board have a shared commitment to the Partnership, each must represent his/her institution's interests as well. The leaders are accountable first to their institutions, and must consider the policies and structural expectations while accommodating the Partnership. The interplay between individual needs and the collective work underscored discussions of the evaluation findings. On the surface, the discussions indicated that each institution had specific needs from the evaluation, but a deeper look revealed that a multi-institutional collaborative, in and of itself, led to different evaluation needs.

Steiner et al. defined collaboratives by highlighting the group task (collective purpose) and manner in which members approach it as follows:

"The principles in a true collaboration represent complementary domains of expertise. As collaborators, they not only plan, decide, and act jointly, they also *think together*, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks" (Steiner, Weber, & Minnis, 1998, p. 776).

Significant to the description is that no one individual's point of view dominates, and authority for decisions and actions resides with the group. While CoPER's central force is its collective commitment to a shared agenda, individual differences and similarities come into play. There is tension among individuals and institutions vying for benefits. At times, the need for separate value-added results collides with the collective agenda. The Partnership's mission is both

pragmatic and lofty. Seeing that separate needs do not unduly influence the whole while supporting multiple approaches to the simultaneous renewal of schools and teacher education are two primary dimensions of CoPER. The evaluation process added generated questions and discussion points to strengthen the collective conversation.

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